

Shanthi Cumaraswamy Streat

Communicate in Business English like a Pro

In 10 Easy Steps



Communicate in Business English Like A Pro Guide

10 Proven Steps You Can Take Now To Start Communicating Confidently in Business with English

By
Shanthi Cumaraswamy Streat
English with a Twist
2017 Edition

Cover Design and Illustrations
By
Kati Alice Bilsborough
@bilsdesigns

Table of Contents

● Welcome to English with a Twist	page 03
● Introduction	page 04
● What are Interpersonal Skills?	page 05
● Verbal Communication	page 06
● Non-Verbal Communication	page 09
● Listening	page 12
● Conclusion	page 15

Welcome to English with a Twist and this Guide

I am delighted to welcome you to the latest edition of my guide where I share with you 10 steps you can take to communicate better and more effectively at work in English.

My name is Shanthi Cumaraswamy Streat and I am the founder of English with a Twist. I am a Business English Trainer and I've been helping people just like you succeed in business with English for over six years. Before that, I spent twenty years in the Finance world and that experience has enabled me to identify and empathise with professionals like you.

I understand what YOU need to succeed at work with English. This guide will take you through the key skills you need to develop to become an effective business communicator in English. It also gives you some English phrases you can start using immediately.

So, let's not waste any more time and let's get started. Here's to your success in business with English.

Shanthi
englishwithatwist.com



Introduction

Practically all my professional clients have one common goal when they approach me: they want to **communicate better at work** in English. But what do they mean by “communicate at work”?

For my clients and probably you too, business communication means being able to:

- get your message across clearly and concisely in a meeting, in a job interview, in a presentation, in a sales pitch
- get the best deal in a negotiation
- give a successful presentation
- write a persuasive document - email, proposal or report
- make a convincing argument
- engage in small talk with clients and colleagues

Effective communication is essential if you are to succeed at work. Known also as **interpersonal skills**, most companies look for staff who have strong *interpersonal skills* because they need people who can work in a team and communicate well with their colleagues, clients and customers. If you have strong interpersonal skills, you have a higher chance of getting your dream job and succeeding professionally.

This requirement is standard for all businesses no matter where they're based and in what language they conduct their business. However, as English has become the recognised international language of business, most non-native speakers of English need to develop strong interpersonal skills in English as well.

What are these interpersonal skills?

The essential interpersonal skills include:

Verbal - What we say and how we say it

Non-verbal - What we communicate without words, for example, with our body language

Listening - How we interpret what people share with us both verbally and non- verbally

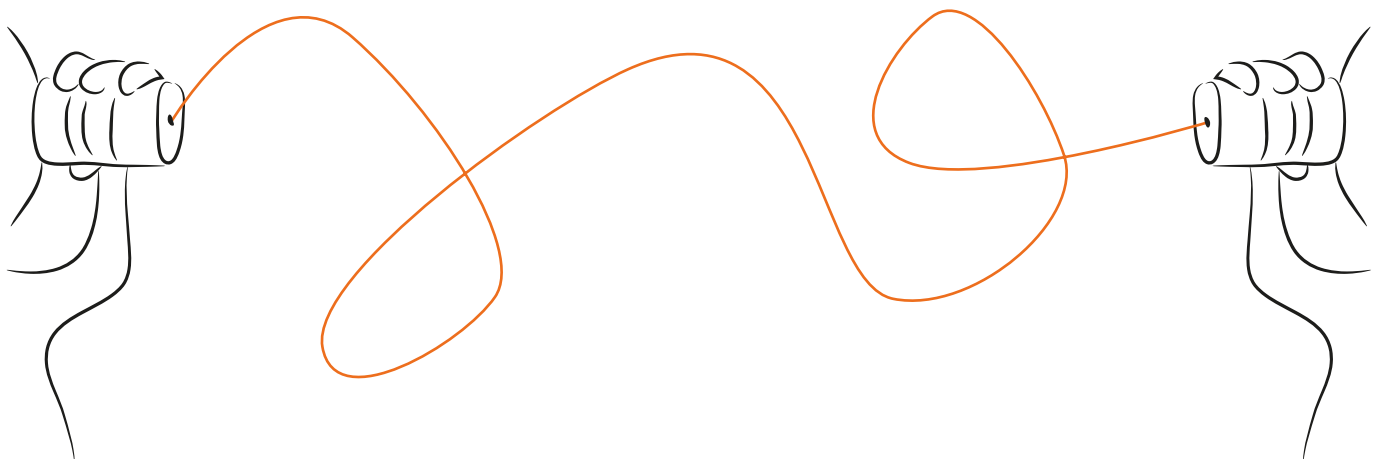
Negotiation - How we work with others to come to a mutually agreeable outcome (result)

Problem-solving - How we work with others to identify, define and solve problems

Decision- making - How we analyse and explore options to make sound (good) decisions

Assertiveness - How to communicate our ideas, beliefs, opinions and needs freely

In this guide, I am going to concentrate on the **first three skills** and share 10 **PROVEN WAYS** in which you can improve your verbal, non-verbal and listening communication in English. So let's get started.



Verbal Communication

How you communicate with other people, whether it's in an interview or with management at work, can make a significant impact on your career development. By improving and working on your verbal communication skills you will quickly connect and build rapport, earn respect, gain influence, and become more likable and accepted.

Here are **six proven** ways that can help you improve your verbal communication skills.

1. Keep It Simple and Concise

Keep your language simple and clear. Use language you know and that your listeners understand. Use language you are comfortable with in English. Don't try and use sophisticated language. It never impresses anyone, especially if you're not sure of how to use it yourself. The more comfortable you are with the language you use, the more your message will flow and be understood.

Your message needs to be to the point. In other words, you need to be concise. Why use 50 words when 15 are enough? Your listener doesn't need to know everything you know. Think about the most important thing you have to say and say it.

Avoid jargon and buzzwords unless your listeners know what you're talking about. However, even then use other words. Plain English is best. Take a look below.

*There's an ongoing problem with the system that hasn't been addressed. We're going to have to **circle back** next week to discuss matters further.*

Plain English: *There's an ongoing problem with the system that hasn't been addressed. We're going to have to **meet** again next week to discuss matters further.*

For more examples take a look [at this post I wrote.](#)

2. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Effective questioning is an essential skill in communication. By asking the right questions at the right time you encourage the other person or persons to exchange ideas with you.

Open-ended questions are the best questions to ask because they give the listener time to reflect on how to answer. Use question words like what, when, where, how, why.

Open-ended questions:

- **encourage conversation** - *“What was the traffic like this morning?”*
- **show interest in the other person** - *“How long have you been working here?”*
- **clarify misunderstanding** - *“When you said what did you mean?”*
- **obtain information** - *“When can we start working on the new project?”*
- **start conversations** - *“How do you know our host?”*
- **test understanding** - *“So that we’re clear, can one of you recap what I’ve just explained and tell us why we’re going ahead with the project?”*

3. Connect Your Ideas

If you want your listeners to follow your train of thought, you must ensure that your ideas connect. In other words, your ideas must flow. Your listeners need to ‘visualise’ the logic and/or sequence of your thoughts. If not, you will find your listeners asking you clarifying questions or simply looking confused.

You don’t have to use complex language to ensure your ideas flow. Use **linking words** like *and, because, therefore, so, however, but* to demonstrate **logic**.

Connecting your ideas can also mean showing a **sequence** of events. Once again, linking words such as *firstly, secondly, finally, next* are easy words you can use to ensure that your audience follows you.

4. Be Polite and Courteous

The English Language is a polite language. If you’ve ever done business in English, you’ll know that politeness and courtesy are necessary ingredients for a successful business relationship. There is a saying in English that says: “People buy from people they like”. No one wants to do business with rude, disrespectful and arrogant people.

And this is where the use of **modal verbs** such as *may, might, could, would* are extremely useful.

Whether you’re giving feedback, making a suggestion or asking permission, modal verbs are your ticket to courtesy.

*“Your presentation was good. Well done. You **may** just want to review your introduction to make it more concise.”* (feedback)

*“If I were you, I **would** contact the suppliers today rather than leave it till tomorrow.”*
(suggestion)

*“**Could** I have access to the mail server to carry out the necessary changes?”* (permission)

Questions are always better than commands. “**Could** I have that report by 5pm tomorrow” will get a better response than “Get me that report by 5pm tomorrow”.

5. Use Diplomatic Language

How you say things is as important, if not, more important, than *what* you say. This is especially true when you are in delicate negotiations, you have to give someone bad news, criticize someone’s work or reject an offer.

Using diplomatic language will soften the effect of your words. Once again, modal verbs are a useful tool.

Compare:

“I’m afraid that would still be out of our price range” to *“This is still too expensive”*

“I think there are some areas of your report that could be improved on” to *“Your report is terrible”*.

Sometimes, combining criticism with some praise can work extremely well.

“I think you’ve captured the essence of the message really well, but you may want to make the summary a little clearer”.

6. Think before you speak

There is an English proverb that says: “*Better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.*” In other words, if you are going to say something stupid, keep your mouth shut.

For example, if you’re going to say something negative about someone, think about how the negative comment will reflect on you rather than on the other person. No one likes a gossip, least of all if you’re considering a promotion.

Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication - facial expressions, tone/pitch of voice, gesture body language - give additional information and meaning over verbal (what we say) communication.

It can allow us to reinforce or change what we say. For example, if someone vigorously nods their head while you're talking to them you have a good idea that they agree with what you're saying. However, if they shrug their shoulders or don't make eye contact with you, you know that there's something wrong.

Non-verbal communication is also **culture-specific** and you need to be careful how you use gestures when doing business and communicating with people from different cultures.

Let me give you some examples*:

1. The popular stereotype of Italians, involving big gestures, lots of hand-waving, and plenty of loud and excited shouting, may be a stereotype, but it exists for a reason. In the Italian culture, excitement is shown a lot more obviously than in the UK, for example, and non-verbal communication tends to be a lot more obvious. This can make it much harder for Italians to interpret non-verbal communication in the UK or USA, where it is more subtle. However, even in Italy, there are geographical variations.
2. The thumbs-up gesture, which generally signals approval in English-speaking countries, is considered offensive in other countries, including apparently Greece, Italy and some parts of the Middle East.
3. Making a circle with your thumb and forefinger like below means OK in Western cultures.



It is used in particular by divers in this way. In Japan, however, it is reputedly the sign for money, and in Arabic countries, it is a threat.

*(Source: [Skillsyouneed](#))

7. Eye Contact

“The eyes are the window to the soul” (Anonymous)

Eye contact is an important aspect of non-verbal communication. When you look at someone while you're talking to them, it shows respect and professionalism. There is nothing worse than listening to someone who looks everywhere but at you. It can also lead to the suspicion that they are hiding something.

Similarly, if you are the listener, look at your speaker. That will tell them that you're concentrating on what they're saying. Avoiding eye contact can mean that you're not interested in what they're telling you which could lead to misunderstandings.

These days, it's very easy to get distracted especially by the messages coming through our smartphones. You need to avoid these distractions if you are to be an effective communicator in business.

8. Use Your Voice

Our voice is a key part of our personality. When I coach my clients in their presentation skills, I spend a great deal of time working with them on how they should use their voice. Someone who uses their voice confidently and clearly will be able to communicate their message no matter what their native language is.

Accents

Contrary to what many learners think, an accent adds to the personality of a voice. Whenever a client tells me they want to speak English with a British accent I ask them which one? There is no such thing as one British accent. We have a variety of regional accents - take your pick.

There is a misconception that if a learner learns to speak like a British person, they will be understood more clearly. That is not the case. I still have trouble understanding some Northern accents after more than 30 years living in the UK.

Having an accent is different from pronunciation. You can pronounce English words and be understood while having an accent. People say that I have a slight Indian accent when I speak and yet that doesn't stop me from being understood.

The important thing is to be understood. If your pronunciation of English words makes it hard for people to understand you, then your pronunciation needs to be corrected.

For example, if you say that *“it’s running /rʌniŋ/”* when you mean *“it’s raining /reiniŋ/”*, I will have to correct you because your meaning is not clear.

However, if you say “it’s raining” correctly but with an Italian accent I won’t change a thing.

Record yourself

I often record my clients so that they get to hear the sound of their voice, and pronunciation. Most of us don’t like to hear our voices and that’s quite normal. However, if you want to become a confident communicator, you need to get past the “Do I really sound like that?” stage and develop a better understanding of your voice.

Try this!

An effective way of understanding your voice and improving the way you speak is to try the following exercise:

Find a document to read, something that’s two pages long would be good.

Read the document once through silently. Then repeat the exercise in your normal speaking voice. Don’t worry if you stop and start. Keep going till the end.

Now read it a third time and this time record yourself. Now remember:

- Slow down - it’s tempting to rush to the end but don’t. Take your time. It’s difficult to understand people when they speak too fast.
- Keep your head up and project your voice to the room.
- Pause occasionally - let the end of a sentence or paragraph or comma allow you to rest for a second or two. Pauses are an effective tool for emphasis.

Practise this as often as you can. If you have an English Language teacher or colleagues who speak English, ask them for feedback.

Source: [Skillsyouneed](#)

Listening

“The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.”

Rachel Naomi Remen

Listening is the most important part of interpersonal communication skills. It is the key to building long-lasting relationships both in our personal and professional lives. A business that truly listens to its customers and employees is a successful one. It leads to greater customer and employee satisfaction and, ultimately loyalty.

And that's what businesses need to grow - customer loyalty.

Listening is not something that just happens. It's not like hearing. Listening is an active process in which you, as the listener, make a conscious decision to listen to and understand the messages of your speaker.

How often have you found yourself in a situation like a meeting or a presentation where it's clear that people haven't been listening to what you've been saying because they were distracted by other things? In this world where there is so much 'noise' out there - emails, what's app, social media- it is increasingly difficult to stay focused and listen to what someone has to say.

A good listener listens to what is being said and what is NOT being said. They observe body language and notice inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal messages.

For example, someone tells you that everything is fine, but you see tears in their eyes, you know they don't mean what they say.

What is Active Listening?

Active listening not only means focusing fully on the speaker but also **actively showing** verbal and non-verbal signs of listening. If you think of when you speak and someone is listening, it's so much more encouraging when you can 'see' the other person actively listening to you.

How can you show you're actively listening?

9. Non-Verbal Signs

- **Smile:** Smiling is a powerful way of showing you're paying attention, agreeing with what is being said or that you're happy with the message. *However*, do be careful **not** to have a permanent smile on your face as that could be misunderstood!

- **Eye Contact:** Making eye contact with your speaker together with a smile can be a great way of encouraging your speaker to continue. Be careful not to stare, though, as that can be intimidating, especially for shy speakers.

- **Posture:** An attentive listener tends to lean forward slightly to demonstrate interest. Sometimes, sitting sideways can be helpful. If you're sitting at a table, resting your head on your hand can help show your speaker that you're actively listening.

- **Distraction:** Don't fidget, look at the clock or your watch, or keep glancing at your smartphone for notifications. Stay focused on your speaker.

10. Verbal Signs

Positive Reinforcement - Think back to when you speak and someone is listening. Isn't it reassuring to have someone positively reinforce what you're saying with these expressions:

- Mmmm,
- I see what you mean,
- Yes, of course
- I understand,
- Sure,

A word of warning: don't overuse them as they can be irritating. Sometimes, it's better to elaborate and explain why you agree with a certain point.

"I know exactly what you mean. I had a similar situation just the other week when....."

Remembering - We all tend to forget details especially if we have to listen for a long period of time. However, remembering key point shows that you've been listening carefully and it encourages your speaker to continue. Remembering things like the speaker's name (you'll be amazed how many people forget that!), key details of previous conversations or points raised in earlier meetings will show that you've been paying attention.

"In our last conversation, you mentioned that the sales revenues for last year had fallen by 5%."

"In that last slide, you stated oil prices had fallen for the last five consecutive years. Could you tell me where you got your figures from?"

Making notes will help you jog your memory when you want to question or clarify points.

Questioning - By asking relevant questions, you'll show that you've been listening to your speaker. Questions will also show that you're interested in what the speaker has been talking about. You could use the following expressions to demonstrate that you've been listening

“Bearing in mind what you’ve just said, would you....?”

“Taking into account all the points you’ve made, could you tell me/us what your company’s position is on.....”

“Judging from what you’ve just told me, do you think you’ll get the FDA’s approval on...?”

Reflection - When you closely repeat or paraphrase what a speaker has said you, the listener, show signs that you’ve understood them. This is a powerful skill because only the speaker can confirm whether you’ve understood their message.

There are two ways you can reflect what a speaker has said. You can:

- **Mirror** what they’ve said by repeating some key words or the last words they’ve spoken. This is a short and simple method.

So that I am clear, you said that the links between the two parties have “irretrievably broken down and there’s no going back”.

- **Paraphrase** what they’ve said. In other words, you use your own words to reflect what the speaker has said. Paraphrasing not only shows that you’ve been listening, but that you’re also trying to understand their message. However, sometimes we 'hear what we expect to hear' because of assumptions, stereotyping or prejudices.

When paraphrasing, it is *extremely important* that you:

Don’t introduce your own ideas: *“I believe what you mean is.....”*

Don’t question the speaker’s thoughts, feelings or actions: *“I wonder if you really believe that?”*

Say this instead: “If I understood correctly, what you said is.....” “If I understand you right, you’re saying that ...?” or “... you believe that ...?” or “... you feel that ...?”

Use some of the words that the other person used. For example, if the other person said, *“I think we should do more planning around here.”* You might paraphrase, *“If I’m hearing you right in this strategic planning workshop, you believe that more strategic planning should be done in our community?”* Source: [Managementhelp](#)

Summarising Effectively - is an important skill to be a good communicator. By summarising what you’ve heard, you demonstrate you’ve listened to your speaker and recorded their message. The summary allows you to get confirmation from the speaker that you’ve understood their message. Summarising involves recording the main points, stating them in a logical/clear way and giving the speaker the chance to correct the summary if needed.

Conclusion

And there you have it, ladies and gentlemen. I hope you've found this guide useful.

Through greater awareness of how you interact with people at work, and with practice, you will improve the way you communicate with colleagues and clients in English.

And if you'd like to work more on your communication skills in English and feel you'd benefit from 1-1 coaching with me, please contact me on my website [English with a Twist](#). I'd be delighted to hear from you.

Thanks for reading and good luck with your English.

Shanthi Cumaraswamy Streat

[English with a Twist](#)